Keeper of the Woods

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/18865345.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham, Abigail Hobbs, Alana Bloom, Jack Crawford
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Fantasy, Dark Will Graham, Alternate Universe - Fae, Fae & Fairies, Fae Will Graham, Canon-Typical Violence, Gore, Blood and Gore, Murder Family
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2019-05-18 Words: 4,569 Chapters: 1/?

Keeper of the Woods

by cellostiel

Summary

Stammets' eyes go dull, and the stag turns its head to look at Hannibal. Blood drips from its antlers down onto the floor, onto its fur, and it looks at Hannibal with irritation. It feels like he's being scolded for tardiness.

Dropping its attention from Hannibal, the stag leans its head down to Stammets, and its mouth opens to reveal sharp teeth as it digs around in the man's chest. After a minute it surfaces with its prize: Stammets' heart. Then it strides away, disappearing around a corner, leaving a trail of blood in its wake.

Hannibal thinks he might be a little in love.

~

Hannibal does not trust fae. He especially does not trust fae who masquerade as human and are suspiciously helpful. Wolf Trap's resident guardian fae is unsettling in his unassuming demeanor, and Hannibal is not about to let a fae get the better of him.

Notes

Ey I wrote this a long while ago but I still really love it and I'm hoping posting it will encourage me to work on it again and hopefully finish it! This is based on the TV show, but I've kind of patchworked Hannibal's past in this from both the show and the various movies.

Currently rated explicit for canon-typical violence, but there may be more steamy things later? We'll see.

See the end of the work for more notes

Wolf Trap is just as dreadfully small as he remembers. Not so small that the herd can't be thinned a little without a fuss being made, or he wouldn't have moved here, but compared to the cities he's used to, Hannibal feels somewhat claustrophobic.

At least he has Jack Crawford and his investigations to amuse him. The man runs around trying to catch killers, human and fae alike, far too often failing. It's rather like watching a chicken with its head cut off.

Over lunch, Alana fills him in on their latest case - a series of abductions, all girls, all confirmed dead when their hearts showed up on the shrine in the woods. She gives him the list of victims so far, and it takes hardly any time at all to see the pattern: the man is using these girls as stand-ins for his true intended victim.

"Jack's nearly at the end of his rope," Alana sighs, leaning back in her seat. "I imagine when we find the next heart, he'll take his own offering to the shrine." Hannibal raises a brow, unsure of her meaning. She glances over him, then frowns. "Oh, right. You weren't here yet when he last did this."

"I'm afraid you've lost me."

"Alright, so… you know about the shrine, of course."

"Yes. It belongs to the god this town worships."

"Worship is a strong word, but essentially, yes. We call him the Deer God because, well… you can imagine. Some call him the Wolf Hart, others, the Keeper of the Woods. There's a few older names for him in some of the books, all dark stuff like Nightmare Stag and Cursed Beast. He's only ever been good to us, though, so most people don't pay those names much mind."

If the creature is a fae, then that is terribly foolish. Hannibal keeps that to himself, nodding agreeably. "And what does Jack intend with his offering to this being?"

"He asks him for help. When we have no other option, Jack goes to the Deer God, and he gives us his aid."

"Just like that?"

"He sees himself as our protector. Most matters he stays out of, but when it comes to dire situations like these, he steps in." Alana pokes at her food with her fork, smiling as she adds, "Also, we give him offerings. He's very fond of fish."

"Curious. A stag favoring fish."

"He's not really a stag. I mean, he is, sort of. Mostly he's human, but in the woods he has antlers."

Of course. Much easier to gain a human's trust if you look like them.

"I'm half surprised he hasn't come to us first." Alana says, picking up her mug. "From what we understand of him, finding human hearts on his shrine would be upsetting."

Hannibal has never known a fae to turn down a human heart. Idly, he wonders if his own heart would have any value to a fae. Doubtful. "Perhaps he prefers to be called upon."

"Maybe…" Alana sips her coffee, thinking. "If we do have to call on him, you should join us and meet him."

"I wouldn't miss it."

~

Another girl is taken. This time she's found, her body laid in her bed, looking almost asleep. She is very much dead, however, and Jack makes the trip to the shrine in the woods, Hannibal and Alana trailing after him.

The shrine appears ancient, the stone of it cracked and almost overrun with foliage. Hannibal spots the beady eyes of a fox from a hole under one of the pillars. The Deer God obviously does not give much care towards the cleanliness of his shrine. It's somewhat of a pity, as the shrine is rather impressive. Four pillars stand at its corners, each with intricate carvings of animals and old language. Its entire base is a light stone, with what appears to be nightshade creeping through the cracks. A slab at about waist height lies opposite the stairs to the shrine; looming over it is an oversized bust of a stag, antlers cracked and partially missing, with its head tilted back as it brays at the sky.

Hannibal stays at the top of the stairs as Alana and Jack approach the slab with their offering.

"Keeper of the Woods," Jack calls out into the forest, "we seek your assistance in a grave matter. We offer this gift to you in return." With a nod to Alana, she places the bundled offering onto the slab. Then it appears there is nothing to do but wait. Hannibal spends the time giving one of the pillars a closer look. Time and weather has dulled the work, but nevertheless they are simply gorgeous.

Minutes pass, and Hannibal tries to decipher the words on the pillar. Now that he looks close, it is not the older form of english he had presumed it to be, though there is certainly some of that mixed in. No, most of the words are in fae writing. One strikes him as familiar, but he can't place where he knows it from.

Twigs crunch underfoot, and Hannibal turns to find a rather plain-looking man approaching the shrine from behind the bust, eyes flicking warily over the three of them.

"What do you need?" the man asks Jack, keeping his distance with the slab between himself and their small group.

"You know exactly what I need." Jack says, glaring.

"Jack," the man sighs, weary, like this is the thousandth time he's had to say, "I need to hear you say it."

"I need you to help us find the Shrike and bring him to justice."

The man presses his lips together, stepping up to the slab. He peels open the bundle, casting a critical eye over the offering inside. After a moment, he nods. "I'll help you." His eyes snap to Hannibal, and he asks, "Who's your friend?"

"A colleague." Jack answers. "Moved into town a little over a year ago. I've been having him help us on cases."

The man nods slowly, looking Hannibal up and down. Hannibal returns the favor, taking in the man's simple clothes, the rough scruff of his beard, the glasses that sit slightly askew on his face. If this is supposed to be the Deer God, the Cursed Beast, then suffice to say Hannibal is unimpressed. The man cocks his head, a muted spark of interest in his eye.

"Very well. Take me to where you found the girl."

~

The man - Keeper, Jack and Alana call him - stares at the body almost blankly, just a hint of a mind at work behind his eyes.

"He mounted her on antlers." Keeper says, his mouth curling in distaste as he reaches out to touch one of the punctures in the girl's chest. "In the hopes that it would heal her in some way."

"Why didn't he take her heart like the others?" Jack asks, an edge of impatience to his tone.

Keeper rounds the bed, blank eyes absorbing the sight before him. Then he pauses, and leans over to sniff the body.

"She had cancer." Keeper says, confirming Hannibal's suspicion. "The meat was bad."

"He's… eating them?" Alana asks, with no small amount of horror.

"He's trying to honor them." Keeper corrects her. "If he doesn't use every part, then it's just a waste. It's just murder."

"Who's doing this?" Jack presses. Keeper tilts his head, eyes staring through Hannibal. He wonders if the fae knows, if he will find himself extorted later, in return for the fae's silence.

"Garrett Jacob Hobbs." Keeper names. "He's killing them so he doesn't have to kill his daughter."

Jack leaves the house without another word, leaving Alana to thank the fae.

"You should have a doctor there, when you reach his house." Keeper says, seemingly ignoring her words. His eyes are fixed on Hannibal, now meeting his gaze head-on. "There's going to be blood."

Well, doesn't that pique his curiosity.

Hannibal gives the fae a small, respectful nod as he and Alana take their leave, trailing after Jack to the Hobbs home.

Indeed, there is blood.

Hobbs slits his wife's throat on the front porch, distracting Jack and Alana long enough for him to dart inside. Hannibal calmly steps past them, entering the house and following the noises of distress to the kitchen. The noises stop abruptly just before Hannibal rounds the corner. He pauses only a moment before continuing forward.

In the kitchen is a stag, so staggering in size that it can be nothing but a fae, facing away from Hannibal with its head bowed. It pulls its antlers free of something, and as Hannibal leans to peer around the beast, he sees that that something is Garrett Jacob Hobbs' chest.

Hobbs splutters and coughs through the blood filling his throat, his eyes on a girl lying in a growing puddle of blood on the floor. He looks up at the stag, meeting its eyes, and says, "See? See?"

The stag thrusts its antlers through Hobbs' skull.

Hannibal looks on as the stag moves to nose at the girl. She's gasping, struggling to cling to life. The stag turns its head, looking Hannibal in the eye. It feels like he's being tested as Hannibal steps forward to tend to the slice in the girl's throat. The stag makes a pleased sort of noise, then steps away. When Hannibal looks up, it's gone.

That, Hannibal thinks, is a creature much more worthy of the title of Cursed Beast.

~

The girl - Abigail Hobbs - survives, and the Keeper of the Woods disappears, his work seemingly done. Garrett Jacob Hobbs' heart is found to be missing when the police recover his body. Hannibal watches over Abigail, more out of curiosity than anything else. The stag wanted her to live, wanted Hannibal to save her, but to what end?

Alana visits Abigail too, providing her counsel and comfort. As far as Hannibal knows, Jack visits her only the once, expressing his condolences and his regret over not catching her father sooner and without incident. From Alana's retelling later, it seems the visit did not go well.

It is two and a half weeks after the incident at the Hobbs' house when Hannibal enters Abigail's room to find Keeper sitting at her bedside. They both look up at him as he enters, and Keeper's gaze sweeps assessingly over him once again. Then he turns back to Abigail, giving her an apologetic smile.

"I think it's time I took my leave." he says. He reaches out and curls Abigail's fingers over an object in her palm, telling her, "Summon me if you need anything." She nods, and Keeper stands, giving Hannibal a small nod as he leaves.

"How are you today?" Hannibal asks Abigail, taking the now empty seat. Abigail gives him the slightest of smiles.

"About as good as I can be. Didn't have a nightmare last night, so that's something." She rolls the Keeper's gift between her hands, and Hannibal notes that it's a tine of an antler. Abigail watches him, eyes sharp. "Go ahead and ask."

Hannibal tilts his head, smiling slightly at her wit. He finds himself growing more and more fond of the girl with each day. "What business did the Keeper of the Forest have here?"

"He wanted to talk to me." Abigail looks back down at the antler, scratching her thumbnail against it. "He didn't accept my dad's offerings. 'The girls did nothing wrong,' he said. 'They didn't deserve to have their hearts stolen and used as payment.' He gave me this, told me how to use it to summon him. Guess he feels he owes me, since part of it was my dad trying to gain his favor."

"Interesting." Hannibal says. "I've never known a fae to feel remorse." Not even when Hannibal was carving into their chest with an iron blade.

"People can surprise you. So can fae."

Hannibal doubts that highly, but he concedes the possibility. "Did you give him your name?" he asks.

"Of course not." Abigail says immediately, looking somewhat offended. "That would be stupid. He knows my last name because of my father, but I didn't speak it to him and he didn't use it."

"Good." Hannibal says, relaxing a tension he hadn't quite been aware of. "I didn't mean to insult your intelligence, Abigail. I simply needed to be absolutely sure. Once your name has been given to a fae, it is near impossible to shake their power over you."

"I know." There's a gravity to her tone that's reassuring. At least there is one sensible person in this town. If the Cursed Beast wants her alive so it can use her for its own gains, then it has chosen the wrong human.

He rather likes Abigail Hobbs. Maybe he won't kill her.

~

Their next killer almost beats him to the punch.

A group of boys find a mushroom garden in the woods, fertilized by human bodies, one of which was still technically alive when they were found. Hannibal watches Jack grill his team for any information they can use to catch this killer, himself wondering if he could somehow sneak a few mushrooms. Would they even taste much different? Probably not, and in any case, it would be rude of him to steal from another man's garden.

They don't have to call on the Keeper, as they're able to trace back the drugs used on the victims to a pharmacist named Elmond Stammets living on the other side of town. However, the man catches wind of their knowledge due to a reporter leaking it, and makes a run for it.

Hannibal marks down Freddie Lounds as someone to keep his eye on, should she turn from a pest into something more threatening. He gets some measure of satisfaction when Stammets grabs Ms. Lounds and demands information from her. He'd wanted to know more about the Keeper, and somehow Ms. Lounds had become aware of his visit to Abigail.

Hannibal is the one she tells this, a slight hint of remorse in her expression. He politely thanks her for letting him know, and leaves to check in on his charge.

It turns out he needn't have worried. The stag stands over the bleeding out Stammets, staring down at him, utterly unimpressed, as he babbles on about how he was going to do the stag a favor.

"I know you visited her." Stammets says, looking almost desperately up at the stag. "I know you're reaching out to her. I can make it so she'll reach back."

The stag lifts one large hoof and places it on the man's sternum. He looks hopeful for all of two seconds before the stag crushes his chest. Stammets' eyes go dull, and the stag turns its head to look at Hannibal. Blood drips from its antlers down onto the floor, onto its fur, and it looks at Hannibal with irritation. It feels like he's being scolded for tardiness.

Dropping its attention from Hannibal, the stag leans its head down to Stammets, and its mouth opens to reveal sharp teeth as it digs around in the man's chest. After a minute it surfaces with its prize: Stammets' heart. Then it strides away, disappearing around a corner, leaving a trail of blood in its wake.

Hannibal thinks he might be a little in love.

He resolves to do something about that later, instead turning his attention to where Abigail is lying sedated on a gurney. She doesn't seem any worse for wear, but he wastes no time taking her back to the hospital just in case the pharmacist used something less than safe to knock her out.

She's fine, in the end, if somewhat groggy for the next couple of days. Hannibal catches sight of the Keeper in her room one afternoon, but when he enters, the fae is gone. The far was worried about her, Abigail explains, but he feels it's best to avoid Hannibal if he can.

"He's guessed your opinions on fae," she tells him with a wry smile. "Said he'd rather not upset you." Hannibal doesn't know whether to be thankful or offended. He settles on wary.

~

Jack takes one look at the second butchered family seated at their dining table and locks down the crime scene until the Keeper can take a look at it. Hannibal elects to wait at the scene, listening to the agents chatter while Jack and Alana make the trip to the shrine.

Keeper spares Hannibal only a glance and a polite nod when he arrives, heading straight for the table. He sits at the head of the table, and his eyes go blank as he looks over the bodies.

"This wasn't the same killer." he says. One of the agents frowns.

"The set-up is exactly the same as the other scene."

"Different killers, both guided by the same hand." Keeper's eyes clear as he turns to Jack. "Both the families are incomplete. Where are their sons?"

"Missing." Hannibal tells him. Keeper looks towards him, but not quite at him. "Both for about a year." Keeper nods slowly, staring at the body of the mother.

"She's kidnapping them, grooming them. She pulls them into her family, then has them kill their old family so they can truly be her children."

"Do you have a name?" Jack asks.

Keeper tilts his head. "I don't. I'm sorry."

Jack heaves a sigh, running a hand over his head. "I appreciate your help, Keeper." Then he leaves the room to speak to one of the agents. Keeper remains in his seat, staring at the mother. His hands are curled into fists on the armrests.

"Keeper, are you alright?" Alana asks, taking a hesitant step forward. The Keeper jolts, snapping out of it with a shake of his head.

"Yes, of course. I just got lost in my thoughts. Sorry." He pushes his chair back and stands, adjusting his glasses. "Are there any other boys that went missing around the same time as the others?"

"I took the liberty of checking." Hannibal says. "There is only one." Keeper finally looks at him directly.

"Take me to his family." Hannibal blinks at him, and the Keeper grinds his teeth together, then adds, somewhat apologetically, "Please."

Well. He hadn't been asking for politeness, but it's welcome all the same. Hannibal nods and leads the Keeper out of the house.

They manage to get there just in time to stop the boy from murdering his family. Then his abductor grabs him and points a gun at him. Never a dull moment when the Keeper of the Woods is involved, it would seem.

"You understand, I know you do." the woman says earnestly, her focus on the Keeper. "You're like me. I see it in your eyes. You never had a family - not a real one, not one that loved you. But we can fix it, we can make a family for ourselves. We can make sure we're loved."

Hannibal looks at the Keeper, curious for his reaction. He does not expect him to be standing there frozen, staring wide-eyed at the woman as his hands tremble at his sides. Fae are not creatures of deep emotion, let alone ones to allow what genuine emotions they have to show, but the Keeper is visibly shaken to his core.

Agent Katz puts a bullet in the woman's shoulder before the situation can unfold further. Unfortunate, but forgivable.

Hannibal steps forward to pull the child to safety, and as soon as Agent Katz is between them and the abductor, the Keeper deflates like a puppet with its strings cut. Hannibal sends him a questioning look. The Keeper shakes his head, taking a moment to compose himself before kneeling to check on the boy with a warm smile.

Jack Crawford arrives shortly, and in the clamor of arresting the woman and figuring out what to do with the boy, Hannibal spots the Keeper slipping away. Curiously, he doesn't simply turn a corner to vanish into thin air, and Hannibal tracks him with his eyes a good ways into the woods. Like this, he almost seems human.

Hannibal catches himself. Fae are not human, they are not anything like humans. Granted, he is not exactly 'human' either, but it's dangerous to think of things as anything but what they are. The Keeper of the Woods is a fae, and Hannibal will not forget that.

~

"He seems nice." Abigail says, shrugging her shoulder. "You know, for a fae."

Hannibal finishes pouring her cup and tilts his head. "Does he?"

"I'm not saying I trust him," she clarifies, turning over a scone to inspect it, "or that I'm going to drop my guard. Just seems like he'd be a nice guy if he were human." She sets the scone down, staring at it on the plate as she says, "I think he's just looking for a family."

"That's a rather interesting thought." he admits. "The other day, our killer had similar ideas about him."

Abigail raises a brow, leaning forward on her arms. "Yeah?"

Hannibal recounts the confrontation, Abigail listening intently. At the end, she hums.

"A lot of these killers are really eager to get his approval." she says.

"It is not so strange. The people of this town regard him as a deity. Faith is a very strong tool of motivation. And many of these killers are lonely; desperate for understanding, for camaraderie."

Abigail is silent as Hannibal brings the tea over to the table and sits. She wraps her hands around her cup, staring into its depths as she thinks. Hannibal allows her the space to do so, sedately sipping at his tea.

"I remember the stag." she finally says. Hannibal sets down his cup politely, giving her his attention. She chews her lip, looking around the kitchen. "I knew my dad was going to kill me, that I wasn't going to make it out of that house alive. But then the stag looked me in the eye, and…" Her thumb strokes the rim of the cup, and a tiny smile plays on her face as she says, "I felt safe."

That is a dangerous thing to feel around a fae, but thinking back to when the stag met his eyes, both in the Hobbs house and the hospital, Hannibal can understand. There's something deep and dark in those eyes, infinite and strangely comforting. It doesn't seem to be in the Keeper's human eyes, but then Hannibal's not sure the Keeper has ever really met his gaze for more than a few moments.

"Do you remember when it killed Elmond Stammets?" Hannibal asks. Abigail looks down at the table and takes a slow sip.

"He put me out before they showed up, but I dreamed about them." She sets her cup down, sitting straight and giving him a hard stare. "They were mad at you. Or, no, more… disappointed. They thought you'd find us faster."

"Unfortunately Ms. Lounds wasn't terribly forthcoming with the information."

Abigail shrugs. "You already saved my life once. It doesn't matter to me if you're there to save it again."

"Clearly the stag thinks otherwise."

"Well that's their thoughts on the matter, not mine. They're very protective of me, I think. They want to make sure there's someone else who can protect me when they can't."

Hannibal rather likes the stag, the Cursed Beast. He'd rather not get on its bad side. "Then I will endeavor to fulfill that role."

"If you want to." Abigail says, like it doesn't matter. But it's a pleased smile that she hides behind her cup.

~

Hannibal supposes at some point he should reconcile his view of the Keeper with that of the stag. They are, after all, most likely one and the same. If anything, they're different sides of the same coin. If only the Keeper would show those dark colors when he masquerades as human - such power and darkness would be absolutely enchanting in human form. It's the Keeper's facade, his attempt at acting human to make people feel safe around him, that Hannibal finds distasteful. He would be much more interested in this side of the Keeper if he didn't act like he was *good.*

Of course, Hannibal isn't much one to talk. If Jack or Alana knew of his true nature, he'd be locked up or have a bullet in his brain before supper. But he only kills, eats, and displays his victims. Fae can and will do far, far worse.

And it seems the Keeper is not the only fae in town.

"He's making offerings to himself, guardians to protect him in his sleep." the Keeper says, looking like he's about to throw up. "No one will pay tribute to him, so he's taking it by force."

"That's fucked up." Agent Katz says. "I'm guessing that's a no-no in fae culture?"

"It's…" The Keeper clenches his jaw, staring at the mock angels the killer has turned his victims into. "Simply put, it's *revolting."*

"What else can you tell us about him?" Jack asks.

"He's stuck in his human form. That, or it's the only form he has. He's vulnerable, probably recently attacked or cast out. He wants to get back some semblance of the safety he used to be so sure of."

"Does he have a name?"

It's minute, but Hannibal catches the Keeper's flinch. "If I knew it, I couldn't tell you."

"What, does that go against some kind of fae code?" Katz asks.

The Keeper twists his mouth into something between a smile and a grimace. "Something like that."

Jack sighs. "Thank you for your help, Keeper. Let me know if you learn anything else." The Keeper nods and leaves the room like wolves are nipping at his heels. He casts a look at Hannibal just before he ducks out the door. Hannibal makes sure his services aren't required before following the Keeper out.

He finds the Keeper in the motel parking lot, pacing by Hannibal's car. He stops when he sees Hannibal approaching, and again, he seems to stare through Hannibal rather than at him.

"You need to be careful." the Keeper's tone is quiet, but hard. "He'll know what you are; he can see it."

"I am always careful." Hannibal assures him. The Keeper glares.

"Look. I think whatever bad things you get because of what you are, what you do, you probably deserve them . But Hobbs' daughter cares about you, and I know you care about her too, so I'm warning you. All of his 'guardian angels' are criminals. He can see their misdeeds, and this is how he punishes them."

Hannibal tilts his head. "Can all fae see whether or not a person is guilty?"

The Keeper looks away. "I don't know. I can't scope out killers just by looking, if that's what you're wondering. But people who have drawn power from their killings…" He looks at Hannibal then, meeting his eye. "They have a particular… energy."

"How very interesting." Hannibal says, smiling. "I do hope you'll tell me more sometime."

The Keeper gives him a suspicious look, then breaks eye contact and steps away from the car. "We'll see. Take care, Doctor. For the girl's sake."

"And you as well, Keeper." The Keeper gives an uncomfortable nod and disappears behind the CSI van. Hannibal stares after him for a moment before unlocking his car.

End Notes

Thank you so much for reading! Please leave a kudos and a nice comment if you like, and you can also follow me @cellostiel on twitter, and at cellostiel on tumblr!! I also have an 18+ twitter I'm more active on, @celloknightkc!

PLEASE DON'T COMMENT ASKING WHEN I'M GOING TO UPDATE. I appreciate the sentiment, but I have a life and the fic will update if/when I am willing and able to. If you want to see more of this fic, consider instead leaving a comment about what you liked about it/what you're excited to see from it moving forward.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!